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ABSTRACT

It is a necessity that physical education programs and curriculum respond to changes in society, and a further necessity that visible and innovative programs be developed which may be used as models by various schools for purposes of emulation, modification, and evaluation. It is the responsibility of those in higher education with special interests and expertise in curriculum to provide direction and leadership, and many higher education institutions are shifting emphasis from research and development to dissemination and school improvement activities. Desirable innovation will depend, however, on levels of cooperation between professionals; change in the curriculum should occur by design rather than by chance, and on the basis of need and interest rather than mandate. Knowledge utilization must be the essence of any curriculum innovations. (DS)

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"ENCOUNTERING FOR LEARNING"

Paper Presented

Encounters for Progress
Curriculum Academy
The National Association for Sport and Physical Education

St. Louis, Missouri, November 6, 1978

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U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
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This working conference-symposium has been informative, stimulating and challenging. And while the range of topics formally presented, informally discussed, and internally evaluated, has left with each of us the feeling that much needs to be accomplished, I know we will leave anticipating that positive changes will occur. In that context I believe it is important to recognize that changes in education are slow, sporadic, and a function of personal commitment. Change and curricular innovation and implementation will not be nationwide. It may or may not occur at your schools or educational settings. We should not, therefore, concern ourselves with the magnitude of change nor, for example, the emergence of a national curriculum in physical education. We need some individual success stories. Changes in professions such as medicine and law, both in content and delivery, have not occurred in wholesale fashion nor have they been manifested in national trends. Changes have occurred in some institutions and not in others; in some courts and not in others; and change, where it has occurred, has not been uniform nor legislated.

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We "need" to develop visible programs which may be used as models by various schools for purposes of emulation, modification and evaluation. And I would "hope" that from a conference such as this that such innovation would emanate and we would generate curricula, delivery systems, and evaluative mechanisms for reference by our colleagues throughout the nation. However, I would not want to minimize change or quality programming in specific schools for, comparatively speaking, a small number of students. Providing a quality program with excellent teaching in a community at a specific school for a few students is a needed, justifiable and achievable goal. Being nationally famous and locally infamous is not a desired virtue nor a predicated outcome of this conference, or of the profession. Much work will need to be done when you return to your particular educational settings. There will be an attenuation in stimulation, little reinforcement from colleagues, continuing academic responsibilities, compassion and receptivity for the known and the maintenance of the status quo, and a plethora of bureaucratic impediments to change. Our capacity for change and implementation lie in the commitment and capabilities of professionals such as those of you attending this conference. With regard to the magnitude of all that needs to be done, I recall an interview with Beverly Johnson who last week became the first woman alone to climb the face of the 3,600 ft. El Capitan in Yosemite National Park. When asked what enabled her to continue the 10-day climb in view of its complexity, she responded that she remembered that the way to eat an elephant was "one bite at a time." While the analogy

of scaling the face of the El Capitan or the eating of an elephant is inappropriate because of the ease with which these may occur when compared with changing and implementing curricula in physical education, the principle is the same (no pun intended).

During the past three days we have had an opportunity to hear a variety of excellent papers by leaders in our field. Sequentially the papers have addressed themselves to "the status of physical education curriculum"; "changing curriculum"; "curriculum content"; "organizational patterns"; "instructional approaches"; "instructional resources"; and "curricular assessment" each followed by an appropriate working session which attempted to meld theory with practice, talk with implementation, and ideas with reality. The bridging of the "proverbial" gap between the colleges and universities and the public schools through a "team approach" was sound and I am sure beneficial. It was, in the management model, an attempt to examine effectiveness and efficiency wherein effectiveness is defined as doing the "right" things and efficiency is described as doing "things right." In the public school sector it is important to recognize that the two are not mutually exclusive. In the public school sector there is no risk factor typically inherent in their mission, whereas in higher education there is an implicit understanding of programmatic risk under the guise of research and innovation. Serially it is the responsibility of those in higher education with special interests and expertise in curriculum to provide direction and leadership in the area of "doing

the right things," effectiveness or validity, if you will, and then provide for procedural considerations and strategies for delivery of those "right things." While there is of course no universally agreed upon curriculum or approach by those in higher education, the source of much discussion and some discontent centers not upon the centrality or absence of consensus in higher education as to what should be provided, but rather on the apparent dichotomy in the profession between what we say and what we do. The contentiousness that exists and the source of a credibility gap tends to be more of a between-groups rather than a within-group phenomenon.

With the emergence of more qualified scholars in the field especially in the area of curriculum, in fact a curriculum academy, and the accompanying and simultaneous increase in the availability of information via publication in texts, periodicals, conference proceedings, etc., there appears to be both a quality and quantity factor which impinges heavily upon the practitioner. With more theory and research being published and presented, frequently in technical, if not educational jargon, interpretation has become difficult, if not impossible. The net effect being that there is a reluctance on the part of many bright, articulate, well-meaning physical educators in the field to refer to such theory or ideas as a means of being progressive, solving problems, increasing teaching effectiveness, and frankly, doing the "right things" for their students. Certainly the purpose of the information provided in a variety of sources and format, is

not to confuse, discourage, nor inhibit, but rather to facilitate rational decision-making, program viability, and problem-solving. In deference to intent, however, there is some apprehension on the part of people on the firing line to take on the bureaucratic structure, enter the political arena, modify programs, disrupt colleagues, and perhaps jeopardize what may be good, existing programs for curricular patterns and instructional strategies that are vague, contradictory and perhaps nowhere in evidence. That is why this working conference—where ideas were followed by discussion, and where the practitioner and the theoretician working as a team, holds such great promise. Parenthetically, I want to indicate that I recognize that there are some in the field who resist change, do not suffer from information feedback, and who themselves do not want to face the reality of where they and their curriculum are in terms of being contemporary. The situation in some cases may best be reflected in the frustrated exchange between a graduate professor, when attempting to explain the ideographic and the nomothetic dimensions of administrative theory queried one of the students, asking which was worse, being ignorant or apathetic, and the student replied, "I don't know," and "I don't care."

In any event the pendulum is swinging away in many institutions or at least assuming a comparable position, from emphasis on research and development (knowledge production) to dissemination and school-improvement activities (knowledge utilization). Departments of physical education, some in major doctoral research center institutions, are beginning to reassess their own priorities so as to give knowledge utilization higher status

than it has had in the past. There seems little doubt that departments, in both the private and public sectors—and despite a recent flurry in "alternative careers," will be responding to practitioner needs directly and to assist in institutionalizing knowledge utilization in the local schools and in state education agencies.[1] Although the specific constituency for theory and research is difficult to define and find, such would not be the case in knowledge utilization with the emphasis on dissemination, implementation, and school improvement which will generate a demand for generalizable and practicable research and development products to be implemented in the schools. This press for quality productivity for the public school sector in physical education must be shared jointly by those in higher education and those in the public schools, but a conflict,

> . . . institutions of higher education have historically maintained an organizational emphasis which is predominantly idiographic, i.e., emphasizing the self-actualization, and fulfillment of the professors, rather than nomothetic, i.e., emphasizing the goals and objectives of the department and the institution.
>
> Faculty members can, and occasionally do, enhance their professional status on a national basis while failing to contribute proportionately to the nomothetic goals set by their department and institution. Administrators are frequently constrained from the pursuit of apparently legitimate institutional goals because they cannot redeploy personnel to staff the programs appropriate to those goals.[2]

But a word on behalf of the faculty (especially for those of you in the public school sector)—the situation of trying

to serve the public schools poses problems for the faculty, (and administrators, take note),

> . . . First, the force posed by contemporary conditions and demands to engage in non-research activities results in professional personnel being hard-pressed to conform to the conventional reward structure in many institutions. The external press (for SCDEs) to respond to school problems moves faculty into activity areas that do not fit the classical methods of rewarding faculty. Professors caught in this conflict risk career mobility; departments caught in this conflict risk status, ...[3]

but both at the expense of impact and service. Goal orientation which focuses on knowledge utilization does not detract from scholarship or the acceptance of the discipline in academe. Nathan Glazer, the sociologist notes that a " . . . . truly striking change in the social sciences—a shift from purely theoretical studies to those that focus on social institutions and on policies to make them more effective—has been taking place in the past decade."[4] In the sociology of health and medicine, for example, early researchers saw themselves as contributing to their disciplines. They were not, comments Glazer, " . . . interested in improving the effectiveness and efficiency of the ward or the hospital studied."[5] But times have changed. Now sociologists of health are interested in the central issues of medical practice. The hospitals are being seen as sites for sociology.

> . . . as soon as one begins to consider what is good policy, one has already broken out of the shell of a discipline. For example, scholars are concerned not only with the 'function' of poverty in society, but scholars are interested in how one reduces it. Mr. Glazer stresses that faculty should be committed

not only to theory but also to its 'grubby' practice. On a number of campuses the notion that one kind of work is superior to another is breaking down.[6]

Conceptually the same is true for the more traditional disciplines. Mathematics, for example:

> . . . for many mathematicians, the key problem to be solved in the 1980's is how to convince the general public that mathematics is a subject worthy os support.
>
> "We should be telling people," said one participant at a national mathematics meeting, "about studies like the one that was done at a hospital in Oregon, which estimated that one death a day occurs because of a simple error in arithmetic."
>
> The public's image of mathematics has become so critical, argued Dorothy L. Berstein, a professor at Goucher College who is the first woman president of the Mathematical Association of America, that the Association should consider financing a serious public-relations effort. [Sound familiar? While we have PEPI—they're going to develop MAPI.]
>
> Other mathematicians, such as Alvin M. White, said the key to improving mathematic's "image" was simply better teaching.
>
> "We've overstated by orders of magnitude the importance of publicity," contended Mr. White.
>
> "What's important is what the teachers do in the classroom—what they teach the kids and how they do their jobs."
>
> Indeed, many college mathematicians were quick to blame their troubles and the anxieties many Americans have about math on poor teaching in the early grades by the "generally" prepared elementary teacher.[7]

Too many teachers in elementary schools, the mathematicians argued, have little formal training in mathematics and even less appreciation for the subject. We need special teachers for mathematics in the elementary schools (perhaps going from one

school to another). The point of referring to both sociology and mathematics is to demonstrate that other disciplines and professions are facing the same problems and issues as physical education, and are bridging the gap by becoming involved in knowledge utilization. We, as do mathematics, have a problem of quality teaching. It will not be enough to get involved in the "grubby practice." We will have to do that, but we will also have to do a better job of teaching prospective teachers, in content and methodology.

Many successful teachers have never forgotten their sufferance of the much-maligned "methods" courses, their sense of abandonment by the college faculty during practice teaching, and their heightened anxiety during that first year of survival. They have been required to take additional graduate work from theory-filled professors who, in their view, do not know as much about the real world and do not work as hard as they do. To twist Veblen's phrase, they see themselves forced to support the leisure of the theory class. As much as anyone else, they understand the need to bridge the gap between theory and practice. From firsthand experience they know that the gap will not be bridged merely by campus lectures and knowledge production. I want to indicate also that involvement in the public schools of faculty is not a unilateral request. Just as some faculty may make significant contributions at the public school level, some may not. But do not assume that those who are out there now, for example, supervising student teachers, are the only ones capable

of change. As institutional and departmental priorities change, as we focus on knowledge utilization as well as knowledge production, as goals of involvement in the field become more clear, and change, so too will the faculty's interest and competency in the area change.

Well, what about the future? What of change? Will this working symposium have an impact on the way people think, on curricula in particular, and on students? Will your enthusiasm waver? Will those of you in higher education go into the practice of what you teach? Will those of you in the public school sector remain open to ideas? Will you try to convince colleagues? Change the structure? Will you administrators lead the way? Demonstrate a commitment in both time and resources? If we are to have an effect, if the curriculum is to have an effect, there will have to be a decided change in present emphasis and a concerted effort of cooperation. Too frequently the various segments of our profession capable of initiating change function not from a cooperative professional referent but rather from an individual institutional referent. Operationally these positions limit choices, impede progress, and tend to be provincial and self-serving. The literature which deals with change in higher education is voluminous but frequently vacuous. An exception may be Rogers and Shoemaker's Communication of Innovations[8] wherein they identify five variables that account for 49 to 87% of the variance in the rate of adoption of innovative practices. If a concerted cooperative effort is made to bring about change,

knowledge and application of these variables may prove to be invaluable. They include:

1. Relative advantage—the degree to which an innovation is perceived as being better than the idea it supersedes. If the curriculum or methodological approach is to be successful it must be thought, by both faculty and students, to be better than what you are currently doing.

2. Compatibility—the degree to which an innovation is perceived as consistent with existing values, past experience and needs. The change cannot, initially, be radical in approach or definition. The needs, interests and values of the students must be considered.

3. Complexity—the degree to which an innovation is perceived as relatively difficult to understand and use. Perception of ease of implementation necessitates careful and appropriate explanation and exploration. Understanding will facilitate acceptance.

4. Trialability—the degree to which an innovation may be experimented with on a limited basis. Try it. Do not lock yourself in by deed or word.

And,

5. Observability—the degree to which the results of an innovation are visible to others. Plan for the results in advance. Provide for reinforcing visibility among the students who are involved, faculty who assist in

implementation, but at first may have been skeptical, and administrators who provide resources and support for further and future innovation.

The most significant conclusion to emerge from an extensive review of the research on learning is that no single grouping or serialization of courses nor style of teaching is best or prescribed for all students or for all objectives. This may at first glance appear to be an inconclusive conclusion, leaving content and method open-ended, but if that "best" grouping and method are to be found, it can only be done by weighing carefully the factors that influence the outcome: course objectives, subject matter, class size, student characteristics, available teaching resources, nature of the school and the personality of the teacher—a fitting and justifiable description of situational theory.

In summary,

> . . . it should be evident that any recasting of the purposes of physical education and any basic restructuring of the curriculum which fails to come to grips with the relationship between the ends of personal living and the broad goals of the human enterprise on the one hand and learning experiences on the other will be less than worthwhile. More accurately, if the present bodies of factual information and the course organization are merely reshuffled, the profession will be guilty of negligence, for these alleged reforms, superficial at best, will lead uninitiated students to believe that they are being prepared to deal competently with the problems facing our field and society when in fact they are not.[9]

The curriculum must be viewed as a process rather than a product. Physical education is in a period of transition, it is growing and changing, in ways that are unique in some areas and as

anticipated in others. Change in the curriculum should occur by design rather than by chance; cooperatively rather than independently; and on the basis of need and interest rather than mandate.

Knowledge utilization is the essence of curriculum. Let us return an aid in implementation, develop a few success stories; become involved in the "grubby practice"; and work in behalf of knowledge utilization.

It was good being with you the past three days. Thank you!

1. Guba, Egon G. and David L. Clark, "Are Schools of Education Languishing?" New York University Education Quarterly, Volume IX, No. 2, p. 11.

2. Ibid., p. 12.

3. Ibid., p. 13.

4. Scully, Malcom, "'Striking Change' Seen Reshaping Social Sciences," The Chronicle of Higher Education, Volume 16, No. 12, May 15, 1978, p. 7.

5. Ibid., p. 7.

6. Ibid., p. 7.

7. Roark, Anne C., "Mathematics: Fundamental Changes Ahead," The Chronicle of Higher Education, Volume 16, No. 12, May 15, 1978, p. 4.

8. Rogers, Everett M. and F. Floyd Shoemaker, Communication of Innovations, 2nd edition. New York: The Free Press, 1971.

9. McGrath, Earl J., General Education and the Plight of Modern Man, The Lilly Endowment, Inc., Indianapolis, Indiana, 1977, p. 18.